

24 Book Review

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# The Case Of the 'Reluctant Spy'

By Daniel Patrick Moynihan

**O**N FRIDAY, Dec. 5, 1975, while I was Ambassador to the United Nations, a member of the United States Mission to the United Nations asked to see me in my office. He closed the door and reported that Arkady Nikolaevich Shevchenko, Under Secretary General of the United Nations, had told an American in the Secretariat that he wished to defect.

Impossible. Mr. Shevchenko was the ranking Russian at the United Nations. The complete apparatchik. A protégé of Gromyko, who took him to meetings of the Politburo. At 47, already touted for Deputy Foreign Minister as his next assignment. It would be the highest-level defection of a Soviet official in history.

A trap? Again, impossible. Soviet citizens are routinely enough used for bait, but not a member of the *nomenklatura*, the designated elite of the system. To cite Graham Greene, he was not of the torturable classes. And yet . . . what if true? We would have to risk finding out. The C.I.A. and the F.B.I. went to work.

The next few weeks were tender. Let it be stated that American agents acted with complete propriety and at times with nerve-bending professionalism. Mr. Shevchenko was approached in a manner that in no way compromised him. Notes were left in books on library shelves. An appointment was suggested. He did not have to come. He came. Then came back. After a point he was asked to stay at his post and work with us for a bit. He had less choice now — but it wasn't the worst bargain.

And so began the career of The Reluctant Spy. (His term.) By February, I was serving as President of the Security Council with Mr. Shevchenko seated at my right. Demeanor became something of a problem. Yet in a building stuffed with Soviet agents, the situation was not without its satisfactions. Motive? His memoir suggests that while the Soviet system was working well enough for him, he had acquired an almost fastidious disdain for its absolute cynicism. Everyone, a few ascetics apart, was corrupt about things (how to get a VCR) and about position (how to get children into schools). He had got his own start by attending college with Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's son. The Soviet elite has become a caricature of all it disavows: a kind of duty-free shop

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consumerism, combined with an autocratic insistence on place.

And then there is terror. Mr. Shevchenko writes of his initial decision: "I had long felt distaste for the world of spying and deceit." Which is to say the K.G.B. I had assumed he was in some sort of trouble, and he possibly was. Rather, it now appears in retrospect, Mr. Gromyko was. Or so it may be: all you ever get are glimpses of possibilities. This was the time of the notorious United Nations resolution equating Zionism with racism. The Russians were behind the resolution, and recent Israeli scholarship suggests it was a move by the chief Soviet ideologist, Mikhail Suslov (now dead), to discredit Mr. Gromyko, the official most closely associated with early Soviet overtures to Israel. In Moscow, Suslov had not been especially friendly to Mr. Shevchenko just before the United Nations official left for New York. The K.G.B. took the precaution of showing him a faked letter charging that in an earlier assignment he had agreed, in return for \$1,000, to arrange the emigration of a Soviet Jewish woman. Would the disgrace of Mr. Gromyko's man in New York advance Suslov's campaign? A case against him would not have been hard to make. Mr. Shevchenko was routinely seen in "Zionist company." He would say he was following orders, but could he prove it? In any case, he came over to our side.

Is there some osmotic process by which the Soviet elites come to sense these things? I surely don't know, and I am not sure Mr. Shevchenko does. But he wanted out, and we agreed to take care of him. Two years passed. As more or less had to happen, the Russians came to realize that someone was passing information. On March 31, 1978, he received an urgent summons to return home. Realizing it was

over, he went to his American contacts who, as if he were already an American, got him a lawyer. Ten days later, on April 10, he announced his defection in a storm of world attention. Even Pravda had to print the news. His wife had been put aboard a Soviet plane at Kennedy Airport the moment it became clear what was happening. A month later she was dead. A "suicide."

Such tactical information as Arkady Shevchenko passed was no doubt useful, but what mattered most was that for the first time ever we had someone from deep inside the Soviet foreign policy system who could describe how it works.

Soviet ideology is seriously defunct by now. (Recall what was actually believed just 40 or 50 years ago: for starters, a worldwide, socialist, one-class society without a government.) On the other hand, the Soviet empire is still very much with us, expand-

ing its borders as it can, dickering with would-be clients as they appear. The regime could probably not survive a prolonged crisis, but nuclear war takes 20 minutes. The Russians may be ideologically dead but they are still deadly. Outlasting them remains the supreme challenge, and this requires understanding them.

May a former United Nations person make two final points?

"Breaking With Moscow" describes in detail the K.G.B. use of the United Nations Secretariat. This is forbidden by the United Nations Charter. We keep to the rules. They do not. And they despise us because we do. Note that Soviet spies turn in their United Nations paychecks in return for their much lower Government pay. In effect, we help finance the Soviet Mission. This will be one of the first things the new ambassador from Tuvalu or Kiribati learns of the United Nations system. What, then, is he or she to think of it?

Similarly, Mr. Shevchenko records how the telephone intercept equipment was first installed in the Soviet buildings in the New York area. If you live here, or in Washington or San Francisco, keep in mind that the K.G.B. may well be listening to your telephone conversations. This would be a Federal crime if your neighbor were doing it. Unless, that is, your neighbor were a Soviet "diplomat." I have had legislation on this in the Senate for years, but no administration will touch it. If "Breaking With Moscow" does no more than to persuade the American Government to protect this First Amendment right of its citizens, it would be a considerable thing. Didn't Arkady Shevchenko defect because he thought those rights were safe here? □